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THE DIFFICULT QUESTION.

A DEAL of thought it did give me, to be sure! Took me better than forty year a-thinkin' about, did that 'ere marryin'; the pint never off my mind, I may say, day nor night. That surprise you, do it? Well, now, I'll tell 'ee how 't were. I been allays, ye see, pooty well to do in the world. I no sooner were growed up, than I might 'ave took a wife, if so be I could 'a made my mind up. But then, the kind o' female I'd choose—ah, that were the rub! Sort o' naturally—for I can't never remember the time when I hadn't got so far—I says to myself: 'Now, Jones, whatever you got to do, or whatever you ain't got to do for your fellow-creatures, the holy estate of matrimony you 'rn bound for to enter.' Sort o' naturally, I tell 'ee, I come so far as that in the question; and, though you may think 'tain't no great way over the difficulty, depend upon it, 'tis a deal further than many a man ever do get. Ah, yes; there's many a one, specially them as is well to do in the world, as don't never make up his mind so far as that. Many a man, if he was to set hisself to work, like I did, a-thinkin' over the peecoliarities of 'em as you in generally calls the fair sex, why, he'd get so scared, bless you, he'd as lief be blown from the cannon's mouth as he'd entertain the very idea of intrustin' his fate to any of 'em; and I've had that told me as a certain fact over and over again, when I've just been a-givin' a little picter of my 'opes and fears to a select party of friends, over our pipes. I ain't drawin' upon my imagination now; I merely alloods to what I knows to be the standin' sentiments of lots o' fellows—ay, and very good fellows, too—though I allays did consider 'em to blame in not havin' ventillated this subjeck, as it ought to be ventillated within their own minds. And for why didn't they? 'Cause they couldn't stand it? No; they hadn't got the courage!

Many's the time Jem Bounceby says to me: 'You mean to wind up this 'ere conversation, Mr Jones, by tellin' us you're a-lookin' out for a wife; then I say you must be a man of uncon-

mon nerve to hold to that line of march, with such a insight of the female character as you seem to possess.' 'Yes, Jem,' says I, 'that resolution allays has been mine; and mind you, Jem,' says I, 'you got the very same thing to do yourself, whether you got the nerve to look at the subjeck aforehand, or not: whatever is the difficulty, you 'rn bound to conquer 't.' For I allays did maintain that a fellow comes into the world a-purpose for to marry, and that ground I do maintain still. Only I held tenacious that, the field bein' so wide, a man's dooty was to look on all sides afore he leaped; still, I never did question as how he'd got, sooner or later, to make that leap. Never. I see my way clear enough so far. No waverin' in me as to what you might call the outside of the question. No. I looks upon unmarried men as sort o' vagabones, a-driftin' up and down the world, nobody know how, nor wherefore; and fellows as got no moorin's, ye see, why, they can't be no credit to theirselves, nor yet to nobody else. And they has to pay the piper nicely, too; for see the thousands o' things as can't never be done without female 'ands, and unless you comes to terms of the special sort with one of 'em, why, you never gets nothin' but taken in and done for, from the first hours o' your life to the last. Truth is, howsoever, there's so many dangers in choosin' a wife, and so many difficulties in doin' without one, that I believe, in general, a man just shuts his eyes to both sides o' the question, and don't care to count the cost until some day or another he's caught. And once it come to a man being caught, 'tain't no use a-arguify with 'im, this way nor that. Not a bit of it; they're mostly all go ahead under those sarcumstances. Bless your heart! and then 'tis wonderful to see how easy some on 'em is caught! Some by a pooty face, and some by a pooty foot; some by a bit o' money, and some by a bit o' flattery. Says I to myself: Never get caught! you lose your balance that way. Never let your head be so turned by neither the doin's nor yet the belongin's of a female, as that you must become sort o' conscious as how you ain't no longer master o' the sitiuation. Mark my

words: once a fellow knocks under to that extent, he never know what sort of a dance she'll lead him to the rest of his days. Properly speakin', 'tis the female as ought to be caught; and a female of the right sort once fairly caught—well, I've seen 'em slave for their 'usbands, and pinch and screw for 'em, and be better nor another right hand to 'em; so that, indeed, I've thought, in such cases, 'twas she as deserved to be called the better 'alf of the two. But then, thinks I, the perliminary proceedin' is, you got to ask yourself, is this 'ere female the one as is likely to make the best 'alf o' me? And let me tell 'ee, 'tain't the easiest thing in the world to find out the answer to that 'ere question afore you makes up your mind whether you'd wish to catch her fancy, or not. No, indeed. And if so be you happens to take the fancy of any o' the ladies while you're only just a studyin' their characters, readin' 'em off, like; not 'avin' the point cleared up in your own mind as to whether this partickler one 'll suit 'ee, or not: well, sometimes that turns out terrible awk'ard. I've known many a fellow get into a fix that way. Ah! yes; there's very good fellows in the world, to my certain knowledge, as 'ave been married more nor 'arf against their will. There is females equal to that! Well, says I to myself: Mind I'll 'ave my own way, at all events. No noose shall be slipped over my head whether I likes it, or whether I don't. If I takes the nuptial tie as a hornymint, that's one thing. But no female shall get possession o' my hand, by no artifices, of no sort nor kind. When I thinks proper to bestow it, then all as I can say is, let her be sufficiently proud of it. But 'tis hard lines sometimes. What between not lettin' one o' 'em turn your head, and not lettin' another o' 'em snap up your hand, a man need to look sharp after hisself in the world. So there, I've told 'ee a few o' the things as a man what's a-lookin' out for a wife got to watch not to do.

And now you wants to know what I consider he 'ave got to do in the beginnin' o' the business. Well, whenever I come across a pleasant face, says I to myself, let's see now what sort of a tongue she got—what sort of a temper. And I soon found out there's a many females with poostie o' faces as won't bear that sort o' inuestigation. And also there is females as don't shew their tempers off-hand like, but 'll take 'ee a goodish time a-findin' 'em out; the more reason you'll find never to regret havin' took your time. Then, I've also observed there often is a dewelopment in the female temper, as take place, or it don't take place, accordin' to opportunities. They ain't allays born with a temper, no; nor nobody 'ud give 'em credit for 'avin' one, not until they gets the upper hand of a 'usband. Sometimes a female as 'ave been, all her life, drove here and drove there, so that you 'ud think she seem to 'ave been pooty well tamed down, why, bless you, some o' that sort 'll turn out harder than the hardest o' masters. Oh, there's no end o' ways a woman mayn't tease the life out of a man, if so be she got the inclination. Then

I've seen girls as 'ud allays seem so kind and so pleasant to ye; but, bless you, they 'ud be just as cheery and as chatty with a dozen fellows to-morrow, if you was in your coffin. And so I went on, a-seein' things I didn't like in one character, and things I didn't like in another; and really, many a time I says to myself: What a plague I should think it to be married to this 'ere girl, or to that 'ere girl, though I will admit they've got pooty faces. There—it 'ud take me a month to tell 'ee half my studies o' womenkind. Fact was, many a long year I never see one as I cared onythin' about, not in the marryin' way; lots of very good sort o' women I knowed, perwided with 'usbands; but as to the single ones, the more I studied over 'em, the further I were from caring for any o' 'em. Still, says I, one got to learn what to avoid, as well as what to choose, and of course my luck 'll turn some day.

But now let me tell 'ee, a-studyin' the sex in general, you may take too wide a field, and find it don't pay; whiles, likely enough, a different sort o' observation do answer better in the long-run. You 'aven't got the world to choose from; though one time perhaps you might 'ave thought you 'ad. No: just you bear in mind you only got a few pieces as you can play anyhow; and afore you knows it, maybe your game's up. Well, now, I see your a-gettin' anxious to know, was I never near being captivated? I'm comin' to that presently. I goes on a long time, a-keepin' up my 'opes, and a-keepin' open my eyes (though people might not 'ave thought that I did so); and so, at last—well, there were one as I see, a real nice girl—the first minute I see her I think so, and to the last minute o' my life I allays shall think so—a real nice girl 'twere; well, I keeps my eye upon her a-goin' on for three year. Her never knowed it, bless her! No; I didn't got that way to work; but I watches how she behaves herself, and I reads her off in my own mind day after day; and often I finds myself a-sayin' to myself: 'Yes; she 'll do; a right good un she is.' Well, just as I begin to see my way clear to tell her that much (but yet I hadn't never so much as opened my lips on the subjeck to her), there comes along a fellow as hadn't knowed her not so many months as I'd been years a-keepin' my eye upon her, and he were just one o' the sort as does that kind o' thing off so quick. There! I see him make love to her, and her take it all so pooty; and I, just keepin' quiet, to see how the thing 'ud go with her—and if he didn't take and marry her afore my eyes, whiles I couldn't scarcely 'ave believed it! No; her did not jilt me; not a bit of it. Her never knowed that I were a-thinkin' about her—not in the marryin' way. Her allays give me as kind a word as I give her, and her hadn't no right to do no more. I never said nothin' to her about marryin', nor yet courtin', nor she couldn't a guessed as I were fond of her. No; I 'll allays justify her—I will. And I do say a nicer girl and a better girl I never wish to see. But 'twere too late when I knowed I'd never see another I'd like half so well. So, then, I begins to think what's the use o' plannin' and schemin' about a prize in a lottery. Them as makes the leap with their eyes shut sometimes has just as good-luck as them as spends better than forty year a-thinkin' over it. So, here goes!—Well, many a man haven't done no better for hisself than I 'ave. My wife keeps a tidy hearth, and she is a woman as 'ud sooner save money than spend it. So, ye see,

I've come to my moorin's. And yet sometimes I says to myself: Is this the very thing as I come into the world a purpose for to do?

BALLOONING, AS IT IS HOPED TO BE.

MR HATTON TURNOR has published a volume so bulky, so handsome, so costly, on the subject of aërostation, that one marvels where he will find purchasers for it. Mr Mudie certainly will not take a hundred thousand copies of *Astra Castra*; nor do we suppose the members of the new Aëronautic Society likely to make a deep impression on the printer's labours. But these are matters which we may leave to the author and the publishers. The book itself, *Experiments and Adventures in the Atmosphere*, is certainly a remarkable one. It is an exhaustive collection of everything that has been done in ballooning—all the successes, all the failures, all the novelties, all the hopes: not digested in such a way as to give it the merit of a history, but rather a series of annals, a chronological arrangement of facts bearing in any way on the subject.

We cannot help calling to mind one series of volumes which has kept alive the subject more continuously perhaps than any other in existence. This is the *Mechanics Magazine*. Nine years before *Chambers's Journal* and the *Penny Magazine* came into the world, certain literary twins made their appearance—the above-named periodical and the *Mirror*, each giving a small octavo sheet for twopenny. The *Mirror* died of exhaustion some years back; the *Mechanics Magazine* still lives, and has grown majestically both in size and price. In looking over the eighty or ninety half-yearly volumes of this repository of scientific and mechanical odds and ends, we cannot but be struck with the eagerness with which aëronauts have poured out their thoughts and speculations into its pages. Starting from the very outset in 1823, a correspondent, S. M., told how we might shield a balloon from the danger of bursting, by a hoop of whalebone. Then E. W. taught how, by having a small balloon with an air-condensing syringe attached to the larger balloon, the aëronaut might raise or lower his machine at pleasure. But T. B. and J. F. at once claimed the honour of having previously made such a suggestion, one of them having shewn it 'at the *Two Brewers* in Brick Lane.' Next we were told of a terrible Turk, Selim Ogal, who had made a very large balloon, with which he hoped to reach nearer to the regions of the Prophet than ever Mussulman had attained before. A modern 'Daedalus' pointed out the peculiar shape of the little parachutes which syngenesious plants employ to convey their seeds to a distance; and suggested that aëronauts should take a lesson from these humble but beautiful products of the vegetable kingdom. G. proposed a balloon for Parry and Franklin to employ, in waiting them over the obstinate ice-fields which refused a passage to their ships. W. S. told aëronauts how they might determine the height to which they had ascended, by letting fall detonating balls, and counting the number of seconds which elapsed before the explosion was heard. Then W. C. shewed by a wood-cut the shape of his proposed flying-machine, a kind of double wind-mill, founded on a theory touching the flying of insects rather than birds. J. B. disputed some of W. C.'s calculations. W. B. taught aëronauts how they might increase the safety of their descent by

attaching their grappling-ropes to a ring round the balloon rather than to the car. After this, G. C. A. broached a theory about descending by the aid of a small auxiliary balloon filled with condensed air or gas. S. R. developed an elaborate 'system of flying,' called the *aviner*, with wings, kites, and levers all in their glory; but P. T. W. ridiculed the *aviner*, as a contrivance that could only 'minister to amusement and furnish exercise to the young.' Next came R. B.'s 'Tractable Balloon;' and J. K.'s Flying-machine moved by steam. The latter was so liberal in his views, that he offered to sell for fifteen hundred pounds one-fourth of all the benefits that might accrue from his invention—an offer which an ungrateful world did not appreciate. Then we find A. M., who proposed a 'Royal Condor Company;' and J. W., who sought to gather a lesson in flying from the flight of the carrion crow; and G. G., who having, as he conceived, shewn how to govern a balloon in its ascent and descent, now poured out his wisdom upon modes of steering.

Next there are particulars of the 'European Aëronautic Society,' founded to establish trips from London to Paris, to Berlin, to Madrid, to anywhere and everywhere; a monstrous machine called the 'Eagle' was really built, and was really exhibited at Kennington; but instead of being lost in the clouds, it was lost one unfortunate day in the Sheriff's Court. R. M. then proposed a small Aëronautic Club, the members of which would take it in turn to have balloon pleasure-trips. T. S. M., after racking his brain about flying-machines, complained how unfeelingly the world treats inventors and men of genius. Next came out the prospectus for an 'Aëronautic Association, for applying aërostatics to the purposes of geographical survey,' to begin with the deserts of Africa; but there were to be four thousand shares of two pounds each, half to be paid on application, and the public somehow forgot to apply. W. B. announced that he had a splendid invention that would solve the problem of flying; but when J. L. asked for an explanation of it, W. B. declined until he could make a profitable market of it. G. C. came forward with a complicated assemblage of cylinders, globes, umbrellas, kites, sails, and fans, wherewith to solve the problem of flying. *Pneumadopteros* gave mysterious hints of a machine which he would make public as soon as it had returned him a good income; and another inventor, whose apparatus could be 'propelled and guided through the air with as much facility as boats upon the surface of the Thames,' nevertheless deemed it 'not consistent with his personal interests to enter into details at that time.'

All these crotchets we find in one periodical between 1823 and 1838; and this will give the reader a taste of what the twenty-eight subsequent years have produced. Every accident which occurred in ballooning, such as that which befell Mr Cocking in 1837, was followed by a flood of suggestions for new forms of machine or modes of management. And this activity was not less in France than in England. In the former country, where centralised forms of government are familiar to the people, most of the aërostatic inventors have bent their anxious eyes towards the centre of power, in order to obtain state patronage.

There certainly is something to say, however little, in favour of the aid to science rendered by ballooning. The art of flying was always a favourite speculation, before anything in the shape of a

balloon was constructed; for, irrespective of the proud pleasure of doing something which no one had done before, there was a vague belief in the mind of each inventor that real usefulness would result from the achievement. Those who raised themselves to a great height by smoke or fire, occupy a place in many a fable. Abaris, Dædalus, the pigeon of Archytas, the oracle of Hierapolis, the British king Bladud, all live in story in connection with such supposed deeds. Roger Bacon declared his belief in a flying-machine, though he knew of no one who had seen one. Van Helmont proved very eloquently, to his own satisfaction, that men could fly. Bishop Wilkins, Baptista Porta, Schott, Cardan, Fabri, all maintained the possibility of flying. The Jesuit, Francis Lana, asserted the same thing, but denounced the attempt on the theological ground, that the Almighty would never allow an invention to succeed by means of which civil government could so easily be disturbed. Kircher, Regiomontanus, and other semi-scientific men, speculated on the same idea. When the Montgolfiers, in 1782, really raised a paper balloon to a great height in the atmosphere by heating and expanding the air within it, the flying theory went into retirement for a time; and Joseph Montgolfier cautiously put forth a hint, that possibly the balloon, in an improved form, 'might be employed for victualling a besieged town, for raising wrecked vessels, perhaps even for voyages, and certainly, in particular cases, for observations of various kinds; for reconnoitring the position of an army, or the course of vessels, at twenty-five or even thirty leagues' distance.' The first men who really left the earth in a balloon, unattached by a rope of any kind to the ground, were M. Pilâtre de Rozier and the Marquis d'Arlandes, in 1783. The subsequent aerial voyages of Montgolfier, Rozier, Robert, Charles, Zambecari, Blanchard, Morveau, Bertrand, Lunardi, Jefferies, Romani, Money, Garnerin, Brioschi, Andreani, and others, familiarised the public with the pleasures and dangers of hydrogen balloons. Gay-Lussac and Biot, in 1804, were the sort of men to make scientific use of their aerial voyages; but the condition of meteorology at the time was scarcely such as to afford them the means. Then followed half a century or so of exhibition-balloon-ing, venturesome ascents by men (and women), who were paid for their services and dangers by the owners of public gardens and the like; varied by repulsive attempts to make aéronauts of horses and cattle—even 'Europa and the bull.' The British Association has, however, shewn a willingness to encourage reasonable ballooning, provided the aéronauts undertake the collection of meteorological facts when high up in the atmosphere. Mr Green made useful observations of this kind in 1843; Mr Rush made five ascents in 1847 and the two following years, and communicated some useful scientific facts to the Association. Mr Glaisher, by far the most successful aéronaut in the cause of science, now communicates regularly to the journals the results of his many journeys—over twenty in number. Every one of them has been productive of valuable observations relating to atmospheric phenomena, electric and magnetic, hygrometric and thermometric, photometric and actinic. In the Report of the Balloon Committee of the British Association read at Birmingham last autumn, Mr Glaisher narrated what had been effected, with the aid of annual grants from that body, 'to examine the electrical conditions of the air at great heights;

to verify the law of the decrease of temperature as found from summer-day observations, already made, with day observations at other seasons of the year, but principally in the winter and adjacent months; to make, as far as possible, magnetic experiments, spectroscopic observations, and records of facts relating to aerial currents, solar radiation at different heights, and moisture; and, finally, to make arrangements for observations at night.' To carry out this last-named purpose, Mr Glaisher caused two excellent safety-lamps to be made for him, that would give light enough to read off observations without endangering the balloon or its appendages. One night-ascent has been made in this way; and scientific men look forward with much interest to a continuation of them; for we are profoundly ignorant of what is going on in the higher regions of the atmosphere during the night. As the night-ascents are more valuable than the day, so are the winter-ascents than those made in summer—because they are more likely to fill up a scientific gap. The fruitful results are already making themselves apparent. Professor Phillips, in his address at the Birmingham Meeting, said: 'Mr Glaisher and Mr Coxwell, during many balloon-ascents to the zone of life-destroying cold, far above our mountain-tops, have obtained remarkable data, in all seasons of the year, and through a vast range of vertical heights. The result is to shew much more rapid decrease near the earth, much slower decrease at greater elevations,' than had before been theoretically supposed.

Ballooning to aid in war is insisted on by many persons as among the good things to come—if there are any good things in war. During the French Revolution, when the republican forces were engaged against so many continental armies, an aéronautic school was established at Meudon, from which four balloon corps were despatched to four great armies, one to each. At the battle of Fleurus, in 1794, Colonel Coulette went up in a balloon to a height of several thousand feet, remained fixed there by a rope, watched the movements of the Austrian army, and gave signals to General Jourdan, which greatly assisted him in the manoeuvres of the day. In the great recent struggle in America, Low's balloon staff was attached as part of McClellan's army. On March 27, 1862, Professor Steiner, Captain Burford, and Captain Maynardier, ascended in a balloon outside Charleston, and ascertained that shells had been thrown by the Federals at too great a range to be sufficiently effective against the Confederate batteries. For twenty years past, Mr Coxwell has been endeavouring to indoctrinate military men in the importance of warlike ballooning; and his ascents at Aldershot and Woolwich have not been without some influence in the matter. The ascent need not be to any very great height; at an altitude of 500 feet, the eye takes in a range of twenty miles radius, or forty diameter, if the air be clear.

We are becoming aéronautical in more ways than one. On the 12th of January last, a meeting was held at the Duke of Argyll's residence at Campden Hill, to found an 'Aéronautical Society of Great Britain.' The noble host himself was chosen chairman; his brother-in-law, the Duke of Sutherland, vice-chairman; Lord R. Grosvenor, another vice-chairman; and Mr Glaisher, treasurer. In his address on the occasion, Mr Glaisher said: 'The first appearance of the balloon as a means of

ascending into the upper regions of the atmosphere has been almost within the recollection of men now living; but with the exception of some of the early experiments, it has scarcely occupied the attention of scientific men; nor has the subject of aërostation been properly recognised as a distinct branch of science. The main reason for this may have been that, from the very commencement, balloons have been, with but few exceptions, employed merely for exhibition, or for the purpose of public entertainment. The first wonder having ceased, sundry performances have been resorted to in order to pander to the public taste for the grotesque and the hazardous; which have tended so far to degrade the subject that it has been, till very recently, looked upon with contempt by scientific men in general.' Here the Aeronautical Society was fitted to render good service. 'A chief branch of inquiry by the Society would be the department relating to the mechanical expedients and inventions for facilitating aerial navigation, and obtaining or aiding a change of locality at the will of the aeronaut. Nearly all contrivances for this purpose have hitherto failed, or have only been successful to a very limited extent. The chief cause of these failures has been the utter absence of a correct theory of the action of surfaces at different velocities upon elastic and yielding media, and the requirements needed to obtain a power for a lever upon an unstable fulcrum. When we consider that the act of flying is not a vital condition, but purely a mechanical action, and that the animal creation furnishes us with models of every size and form, both simple and compound wings—from the minutest microscopic insect, to the bird that soars for hours above the highest mountain-range—it seems remarkable that no correct demonstration has ever been given of the combined principles upon which flight is performed, or of the absolute force required to maintain that flight. In the absence of an established principle, much time and money have been wasted in attempts to adapt aerial propellers; and it will be the office of the Society to bring forward any information or successful experiment illustrative of a theory.'

And so the Society was established. The Commissioners of Patents have presented copies of all the specifications for patents in aërostation from 1617 to the present time; and application has been made for a room at the South Kensington Museum for receiving the Society's models.

AN OCEAN WAIF.

IN NINE CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER IV.

THERE was a pretty sharp row about that evening's upset, and I believe the captain apologised to Major Horton about it. I don't think the old soldier thought any the less of the captain on account of it, for they kept very good friends; but I never, during the next four days, once saw the ladies on deck alone; while, as for Hicks and his party—well, I have seen a few ill looks pass in my time, but I never did see anything quite to equal some of them as were sent from that party after the gray-bearded old major.

We were a crew of eighteen men—all told—four of 'em being fresh hands, shipped at Sydney; and on the fourth night after the upset, it being our watch, Tom and me leaned over the bulwarks together, talking quite low, for Hicks's party had a

table and chairs close by, and were sitting smoking and drinking.

'Jack,' says Tom to me all at once, for he was a deep, quiet chap, always thinking, and putting this and that together—'Jack,' he says, 'there's something up.'

'All right,' I says; 'what is it?'

'Them four chaps as shipped at Sydney.'

'Well, what about 'em? They're regular swabs, anyhow.'

'They're a bad lot,' says Tom; and then Hicks's party got up, and came sauntering along towards us.

'I watches my chance,' says Tom in the same tone; 'and the next time as he come under, down goes the harpoon, and I hit him slap. He pulled hard enough, but I had him; and arter so much salt tack, a bit of fish is first-rate, if it is only bonito.'

'Eh?' I says, for I couldn't make him out.

'Keep dark,' he says; 'they're a-coming back.'

'You know,' says Tom, going on again, 'all you have to do is to look sharp, and aim straight: any fellow could do it; and if the skipper'll let us, we'll— There,' says Tom, 'they're gone down now, and our watch is up; so let's turn in.'

Only that I knew t'other way, I should have said as Tom had been splicing the mainbrace; and I followed him down, and turned into my hammock close aside his, hardly knowing what to make of him.

'Now, I tell you what,' says Tom, beginning again, 'there's something up, my lad.'

'Well,' I says.

'How came them six passengers to be so thick with Rudd, and Johnson, and Brock, and Perkins?'

'How should I know?' I says. 'Why, what an old mare's-nest hunter you are, mate.'

'I've been reckoning 'em up, Jack, for above a week; and I knows a little more than they think for; and now I just want to get one more knot undone, and then I shall lay it all afore the skipper.—You're asleep, ain't you?'

'No, I ain't,' I says, rousing up, for I had been next door to it.

'Well, I tell you what,' he says, 'they mean that gold—that's what they mean!'

'What, their own?' I says, getting interested; for though I chaffed him, I thought a good deal of what Tom Black said.

'No, no,' he says—'the treasure; and I'm blest if I don't think as them three chests o' theirs is all on 'em dummies.—Now, then, what d'yer think o' that, lad?'

I was so took aback for a bit, that I didn't know what to think; so I says: 'What makes you think so?'

'What do they want to be such good friends with them four chaps for, when nobody else is there; and not know 'em when somebody's a looking on?'

I didn't say anything.

'What do they want to know so exactly where the ship is, and to get her place marked on the chart for?'

I didn't answer.

'What do they pretend to know nothing about the sea for, and always call every sheet and bit of tackle by the right name, and have their sea-legs as soon as they come aboard?'

I didn't say nothing.

'I tell you what it is, Jack Cross,' he says, 'it's my belief as there'll be a fight afore long, and p'raps a change o' skippers; and if so, why, the Lord ha' mercy on them two poor gals.'

'Tom,' I says, growing quite husky, 'surely not quite so bad as that.'

'Mate,' he says, 'there's fifty thousand pound worth o' gold in them little boxes, and what some chaps would do for that!'

'What's the matter?' I says in a whisper, for he'd stopped short.

He didn't answer, but leaned over and clapped his hand across my mouth, and of course I lay still as could be, listening.

After a minute, he takes his hand away, and says: 'There's some devilment up, Jack Cross, and I'm hanged, mate, if I don't think it's on to-night.'

He spoke so huskily, too, and seemed so warm, that I could feel my heart go 'thud, thud,' like a pump.

'Why, what's up?' I says.

'Mate,' he says, 'there's two o' them Sydney chaps in the watch as relieved us; and when I stopped you, I know I heard some one a-stealing up the companion-ladder.'

'Phew!' I says very softly. 'What shall we do?'

'Let the captain know,' says Tom.

'If we can,' I says; for something struck me that if it was as he said, we should be stopped.

'Ah! if we can,' he says; and we slipped out quietly, and were both ready in a minute.

'Hadh't we better rouse up these chaps?' I said, for there was half-a-dozen down beside us.

'Wait a bit,' says Tom; 'p'raps it's only a hum after all!'

So we stole under the hammocks to the ladder, and as I was first, I crept up, raised my head above the combings, and looked round, but did not see anything particular; so I crawled quietly on to the deck, and waited for Tom. He was aside me in a moment, and we were beginning to feel rather foolish, and to think we had both of us better go down, when, as we knelt close under the shade of the long-boat, we heard a bit of a scuffle aft, and then there was a faint cry, and a heavy plunge in the water, and then another cry, but fainter.

'Hush!' says Tom, grasping my arm; and then several dusky figures ran by us, seemingly bare-footed, for you could hear the 'pad, pad' of their feet on the deck, and directly after there was another short scuffling noise—the sound of some one trying to shout with a hand held over his mouth—and then another splash in the water.

'Come on,' says Tom; and I followed him, and we crept along by the bulwark, and then darted down the cabin stairs, stopping a moment to listen, and then we heard them closing the hatch we had come up, and there was the sound of rope being piled on it.

We were at the bottom in an instant, when I was seized by the throat, and a voice growled: 'Who's this? What's the ship's course altered for?'

'Look out, Mr Smith,' hissed Tom: 'mutiny! They'll be here in a moment.'

'Damn nonsense,' roared the old fellow, pushing by us, and running on deck; and as we banged at the captain's and Major Horton's door, we heard a gurgling cry, an oath, and a heavy body fall. Directly after, there was a rush down the stairs;

and as Major Horton's cabin door opened, some one struck me a tremendous blow on the head, and I fell; but was conscious enough to see the major, with a light in one hand and a pistol in the other, send one fellow down; to hear the piercing screams from the two poor girls, whom I could not help; and then to hear the sound of shots and oaths, and blows in the captain's cabin, for a few moments; and then all was still—except the shrieks of the poor girls; while directly after more lights were brought, and I saw lying across a chair, with his head and legs upon the floor, the body of the poor old major; and then all seemed to be blank for a bit.

The next thing I recollect was hearing Hicks's voice giving orders, and I heard him say: 'Over with him;' and then there was the sound of a heavy body being dragged along the floor of the next cabin, and then I heard the head go 'bump, bump' up the cabin stairs; then scrape along the deck; and then came a heavy plunge in the water.

'That's the poor skipper,' I thinks to myself; and just then somebody walked right over me, and into the cabin, and I saw it was Hicks.

'Serve this old beast the same,' he says; and Phillips and Johnson takes hold of the poor old gentleman's legs, and drags him along; and as they knocked the chair down, there was a cry from the inner cabin.

'Silence!' roared Hicks, dashing the but-end of his pistol against the door; and then I felt the body drawn over me, and the warm blood drip on my face, and smear across it, as it was dragged along. Then followed the 'bump, bump' of the head up the stairs; the creeping, rustling noise on the deck; and then a splash told me the poor old gentleman was gone.

Now, just then I was in a sort of sleepy, dreamy state—half-witted, I may say. I could see and understand all that passed, and yet did not seem either in pain or afraid. I remember thinking that it would be either my turn or else Tom Black's next; for I supposed he was knocked on the head too, and lying in the captain's cabin; and I remember, too, feeling very sorry for those two girls; and then two fellows caught hold of my legs, dragged me up the cabin stairs, across the deck, and then I felt some one give me a bit of a heave, and felt the shock as I struck the water; and then it was as if new life rushed through me, and as I rose to the surface, I struck out, and directly after felt the ship's side.

I suppose that one of the first things they must have done, and the thing which poor Tom and I heard, was to pitch the man at the wheel overboard; for the ship was rolling in the trough of the sea, very gently, for there was no breeze on; and very fortunate this was for me, as I was able to swim along the side and climb up on to the rudder-chains, where I had just strength enough to lash myself with my handkercher, when I turned dead-sick again, and nearly slipped back into the water. But, somehow or another, in a half-stupified way, I managed to cling where I was, getting my legs well twisted round; and there I hung, drenched with the sea, shivering with the cold, but getting brighter and clearer in the head, which I now found was badly cut; but it soon stopped bleeding; and you may well suppose mine were not pleasant thoughts, holding on there under the stern of the ship—cold, and sick at heart, and waiting for the morning.

CHAPTER V.

If any poor wretch ever longed for the coming of daylight, I was that poor fellow, as clung there, feeling so weak and bad at times that I could have cried like a child; but after a bit I thought of my bacca, and got a bit in my mouth, and it did seem such a comfort. Being quite clear in my head now, and only in pain—pretty sharp pain, too, from the cut—I could think of all the events of the night without getting muddled and confused, as I did at first when I tried to; and now it seemed all clear enough, and just as poor Tom thought, for it was a deep-laid plot to get the treasure, and one which had succeeded only too well. And then I began to think about how many had been killed, and I counted up—two of the men in the watch; old Smith, the mate; the skipper; the poor old major; and Tom Black, sir; and then I wondered whether they'd killed the poor girls; but at that same moment I thought about Hicks and Phillips, and a regular shudder, and a sense of going half mad, ran through me, so that for a few moments I felt half blind, as though blood ran to my eyes; and that's how I felt every time I thought of those two scoundrels.

The more I thought of the bloody deed of the past night, the more impossible it seemed; for though we used to hear tell of such things, and the old-salts knew many a pirate yarn, yet it didn't seem to belong to these times, and I almost fancied I was making a fool of myself.

But there was no deceit about it—worse luck—and soon I began to count up how many chaps were left; and I reckoned there'd be eight, 'and not one of 'em as would turn pirate, I'd swear,' I says to myself. And then I wondered what they'd do with them, for they were all caged up safe in the forecastle. 'Why, they'll shove them in one of the quarter-boats with the ladies, and cast them adrift,' I says.

Morning at last: first, a faint light; then, a red glow; and then, with a rush, up came the sun, seeming to make every wave a mass of jewels dancing in a flood of red gold, while the sky looked so assuring and sociable, that it seemed impossible that such a bloody deed should have been done in the darkness. Every warm ray served to cheer me up, and give hope of life, till I thought again of what was to become of me; was I to be shot, or to fall off for the sharks, or be drowned, or what? But another glance at the warm sun and the bright sky cheered me on again; and I thought I'd wait till they sent the rest of the crew off in a boat, and then I'd swim off to them, and risk the sharks.

And now there seemed some moving about, for the rudder was shifted, and the ship made some way; but, directly after, it fell calm, and she swung round, so that I got the full glow of the sun, which began to dry me a bit, and warmed my stiffened and chilled limbs. Then I could hear them dashing water about, and swabbing the decks, as busy as could be.

'That's to get rid of the blood,' I says; and soon after I hears a good deal of noise, and talking, and swearing; and then there was a pistol-shot, and directly after a splash in the water; and after a bit I saw a body float along, and knew the face as that of a mate as had been in my watch—a good man and true—and while I was looking sorrowfully at him, there came a sharp rush in the water,

and then he was dragged under, and I saw him no more; but at the same moment from above my head I heard a faint scream, and the whispering of voices, and then the closing of a window.

The sound of those voices revived me, so that I roused up, or I believe I should have slipped into the water, I felt that sick and dizzy, and then the sharks would have had another meal. I suppose I was weak from loss of blood, and besides, I had never seen any horrors before; while there had been enough during the last few hours to upset any poor fellow. I must have gone; for I had tied my handkercher round my head, because the cut was painful.

By and by, I heard the boat lowered, and splash in the water; and after a bit, as if they were putting in provision and water, I heard her push off, and made ready for a swim, or else to shout to them. So I leaned out as far as I could, and watched till she came in sight; for I dared not let those on deck see me; but when at last I did see her, my heart seemed quite to sink, for there were only six men in her, and the young ladies were not there; while, after a bit of study of the faces, I made out as it was the cook that was left behind.

'Poor gals, poor gals!' I muttered to myself, and I shrunk back in the chains, and sat there thinking, and giving up all hope of going with the boat, for I didn't feel as if I could; and so, without seeing me, the poor chaps rowed away, and at last got to be quite a little speck.

The heat of the day came, and still it was calm; then the evening, and I'd sat there with nothing to keep me up but a bit of tobacco; and now I knew it would soon be sunset, for the sky was getting all glorious again. I had not heard any more of the young ladies, though I fancied once the window opened; but from where I was, I could not climb up, nor yet see; and so I sat and waited, meaning to try and climb on deck when it was dark, for I felt famished.

Every now and then, I could hear the fellows shouting and singing, and it was evident that there was plenty of grog on the way. This set me thinking again about Hicks and Phillips, and I could feel now as nothing was too bad for the villains; and I tried whether I could not climb up to the window where the ladies were, knowing all the time that I, single-handed, could do nothing. But I soon found out that I could not manage it, and made up my mind to wait till it was dark, when perhaps they could hang out something to help me.

I was sitting waiting for the night, when all of a sudden I heard the window-glass up above me dashed out, and the little pieces fell spattering into the water; and then I know, for a few moments, I went mad, and frothed at the mouth. Shriek after shriek, and the noise of struggling; prayers for mercy, help, pity; and all in the most heart-rending tones; the knocking together of furniture and breaking of glass; and still, above all those pitiful cries for help, there came the angry voices of men and oaths; once, I felt sure, blows; and still the cries continued, and all at once ceased. Then there was the loud banging of a door, and noise and swearing on the deck; and all the while I was holding my head tight against the side of the ship, to keep it from splitting, for it seemed as though my brain must burst my skull.

After a bit, I heard a loud wailing sob, and such a bitter cry as brought the pitying tears coursing

down my rough cheeks, and that seemed to do me good, and I tried to make her as cried hear me. But I could not, and then I listened again, and I heard a choking voice say: 'God! Father, forgive us, for we cannot live!' and then it was quite dark, and I heard in the stillness of the night those two sisters bidding one another good-bye, so sweetly and lovingly, and my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth, for a horrid chill ran through me, and I knew they were going to jump in. 'Stop, stop!' I cried at last, in a voice that I didn't know for mine.

'Who spoke?' I heard from above me.

'Hush!' I whispered, leaning out as far I could—'hush! it is me—John Cross.' And then I heard a sound as if some one had fallen on the ground. A few minutes after I heard the voice again.

'Pray—pray, save us! For Heaven's sake, help!'

'Yes, yes!' I said; 'but speak low, or we shall be heard.—Miss Mary?'

'Yes,' cried the voice eagerly.

'Is there a rope of any kind there?'

There was silence for a minute, and then she said: 'No!'

'Are you listening?' I said.

'Yes,' she whispered.

'Then take the sheets from the cots, and tie them tightly together, and then fasten one end to the table; tightly, mind.'

I waited while I could hear her busily toiling, but in a few moments the voice whispered despairingly: 'I can never tie them tightly enough.'

'Never mind,' I said; 'only tie them, all you can find, together, and lower them down.'

Soon after, something white was lowered from the cabin window, and hung down, swaying backwards and forwards; and at last, after many tries, I reached it. More and more came down, till there was far more than I wanted, when I made the knots fast, and whispered to her to draw up. 'Now,' I said, 'as soon as it is tight, twist all you have round the table-leg, and hold on.'

In a few minutes, I found the sheet-rope would bear my weight, and directly after, I was holding on by the cabin-window, with those two poor girls clinging, crying to me, and begging me to save them.

I felt most mad, as I looked at them by the light of the cabin lantern. Hair torn down; dresses half dragged from their shoulders; while, right across the face of Miss Mary, was a mark as of a blow, while her poor lip was cut and bleeding.

'Oh, pray—pray, save us!' she cried, putting her poor hand on mine, as I clung there.

'As I hope God may save me,' I said; 'or I'll die for you.'

And then there was silence for a few moments; and if I had dared, I should have kissed the soft hand that nestled against mine so trustingly, but I thought it would be cowardly, and I did not.

'And now,' I whispered, 'I'm going on deck.'

'Ah! don't leave us,' sobbed Miss Madeline.

'It is to try what I can do to get you away,' I whispered; and then the poor girl, who seemed half fainting, sank down, kneeling on the floor, and her sister leaned over her, and said to me: 'We'll pray for you, Cross.'

'Then I shall succeed,' I said, for I felt that I should; and so I left them, feeling nerved to have done anything in their defence.

I soon was over the poop, and crawling close under the bulwarks, when I found that the man

by the binacle-light was fast asleep, for the ship made no way at all. I stopped in the darkness for a few minutes, listening, and could hear voices in the fore-cabin; and it was evident there was a good deal of drunkenness and carousing going forward. Half-a-dozen stanch, well-armed fellows could have secured the ship, I felt sure, as I opened my knife that hung by a lanyard to my waist, and then shoving it open in my belt, I crawled to the skylight, and looked down into the passengers' cabin, where I could see Hicks, Phillips, and two more playing cards, while another lay on the bulkhead asleep. It was a good thing I had no pistol in my hand, or I should have had that Hicks's blood upon my head then.

I crept away from the skylight and under the bulwarks again, though it was as dark as pitch, and began making my way towards the other boat as hung from the davits; when all at once, some one had me by the throat, and tried to turn me on my back; but I was too quick, for I had my knife against his ribs in a moment, and hissed out: 'You're a dead man if you stir.'

That was sharp practice, for we were both on our knees close against the bulwarks, and I could feel his hot breath right in my face, as he must have felt mine. Just then, he gave a bit of a shift, and my knife pricked him, for I meant what I said then; but the prick made him start so that he a bit got the better of me, and had tight hold of my hand which held the knife.

'Now, you murdering, piratical scoundrel,' he hissed between his teeth; and I began to feel that if I didn't look sharp I should have the worst of it. 'Now give up the knife, you dog, or I'll strangle you, if it's only for poor Jack's sake.'

'Hullo!' I says in a whisper, slackening my hold.

'Hullo!' he says in a whisper, slackening his hold.

'What, Tom, matey!' I says.

'What, Jack, old lad!' he says; and I'm blessed if we didn't hug each other like two great gals.

'Why, I thought they'd knocked you on the head,' I says.

'Why, I see them pitch you overboard,' he says.

'Yes,' I says; 'but I got on the rudder-chains.'

'Ah!' he says; 'and in the tussle I was knocked down; but I got down below after, and got in that empty water-cask. I ain't been out quarter of an hour.'

'Who's on deck?' I says.

'Only that chap at the wheel,' he says, 'for I've been all round.'

And then we had a whisper together for five minutes, which ended in our creeping up to where the boat hung.

'There's water in her,' says Tom.

'And there's safe to be some biscuit in the locker,' I says.

'But,' says Tom, 'hadn't we better stop in hiding? We shall be starved.'

'Tom, mate,' I says; and then I whispered to him about what I'd heard and what I'd seen, when he stopped me.

'Hold hard, mate,' he says; 'just see if the boat-hook and the oars are in. I'm with you.'

Everything was in its place; and then cautiously we undid the ropes, and began slowly to lower down the boat, meaning to fasten the lines at last, and slide down. The blocks ran easy enough, but on such a silent night, do what we could, there was

some noise; and at last one of the wheels gave such a chirrup, that the noise in the cabin stopped, and we stopped too; and directly after, some one came up the cabin stairs and on deck; and as we cowered close together under the bulwarks, holding on to the ropes, and trembling lest we should let them slip ever so little, Hicks—for I knew his step—walked close by us right forward, and then back on the other side, where he kicked the man by the wheel savagely, and spoke to him once or twice, but there was no answer, and then muttering to himself, he went below again.

'That was close,' said Tom, for he had almost brushed against us; and then we each took a long breath, and, amidst a good deal of noisy talk, the boat kissed the water, and we lashed our ropes fast.

'Now, if we only had some more prog,' said Tom, 'I wouldn't care.'

'Don't stop, mate,' I says; 'there's lines in the locker, and p'raps they've something in the cabin.'

'All right,' says Tom; and he slid over the side, and was in the boat in a moment; but not without rattling one of the oars, and I trembled again for fear he should have been heard. But all was quiet, and the next moment I was beside him; and as we couldn't unhook the boat, I cut the ropes fore and aft, and then Tom slowly worked her along and under the cabin window where those demons were sitting; then past the window of the captain's cabin, round the rudder, and then there was a joyful cry, for I had fast hold of the sheets hanging down.

'Make her fast with the painter, Tom,' I said; and up I went, and next minute stood between those two poor creatures, both of them clinging to me in that sad way—it was pitiful.

'Hush!' I said—'not a sound;' and then drawing up the sheet, I just looked at the knots, and made it fast round Miss Madeline, for Miss Mary would not go first. Poor girl, she tried all she could to help me; and so, she creeping out herself, I lowered Miss Madeline down into the boat, and the shaken sheet told me all was right.

'God bless you for this,' whispered Miss Mary, as I made the sheet-rope fast round her. 'Be kind to us, for we are in your hands.'

I didn't say anything, but I did kneel down and kiss her hand that time. She was a deal more active than her sister; and in another minute, I had her lowered down into the boat, and Tom cast off the sheet.

'Shy down some blankets,' he whispered; and I dragged those out that were in the cots, and threw them down, and the pillows too. On the table was biscuit, cheese, meat, and cake, and these I slipped into a pillow-case, and lowered down. In the lockers, too, were biscuit-tins, and two wicker-covered bottles; and these I lowered down, for I felt safe now, knowing how soon I could slip down, and that the ladies were out of danger; for I knew, if discovered, pursuit would be vain in the dark. So, as fast as I could, I lowered down cases of preserved meat, and wine, and everything of use that I could find in the lockers, when, giving a glance round, I thought, now I'll go. I thought the sheet-rope might come in, though, as an awning, so I stooped down to untie it, meaning to slip it round the leg after, and slide down with it double, so that I could then loose one end, and draw it after me. It was hard work, though, for the knots had been strained, and I kneeled at last, and tried

my teeth; but they were no good; and I pulled my knife out of my belt, cut the knot, drew up enough so as it should give double, and was passing it round the leg, when I heard a noise, started up, and leaped on one side, just as Hicks stood in the door, and fired at me. He had lowered his revolver to cock for another shot, but he had not time, for I was on him in an instant, with my knife driven deep into his throat and chest; and then, as he fell with a wild gurgling cry, I wrenched out the knife, dragged to the door, and was out of the window, just as Tom was climbing up by means of the boat-hook, for he could not reach the sheet.

'Back,' I says—'back quickly, and cast off the painter; and while he was getting out of my way, I had time enough to see Hicks give two or three clutches at the carpet, and then lie still. The moment after, I was in the boat, and with one tremendous shove, sent her yards away from the ship, as it were into a thick bank of darkness.

'Lie down,' I whispered to the ladies; and Miss Madeline crept to her sister's feet, while Tom and I got out the oars, and as quickly as possible paddled away, not daring to make a sound, for there was a noise on board, and three or four shots were fired at random out of the cabin window. Then we could see them on deck, and some one fired a pistol off again; but the bullet never came near us.

'They're going to try and launch a boat, I expect,' said Tom with a chuckle; 'and there's the dingy, as'll hold two comfortable; and as for the long-boat, I don't think they'll get her over the side to-night.'

'Pray—pray, row fast,' cried Miss Mary. 'Can't we help?' and she moved forward as if to get to an oar.

'God bless you, no, miss!' I said in a whisper; 'we'll bend to it directly.' And then we paddled a little further off, till I thought they couldn't hear the oars in the rowlocks, when we both bent to it, and rowed stroke for stroke for a good hour, and all on right through the thickest darkness I ever saw, and long after the lights in the cabin window of the good ship *Southern Star* had disappeared.

All at once Tom stopped, and threw in his oar.

'What is it?' I says.

'Matey,' he says, 'I haven't had bit nor sup since tea last night; and I think we shall work better after somethin'.'

I hadn't thought of it before; but I knew how weak I felt, and so I pulled in my oar too, and Tom pulled up one of the biscuit-tins, and found the cheese and a bottle.

'Lend me your knife, Jack,' he says, and my hand went naturally enough to my belt; but the moment after I shuddered, and told him to break the cheese, pretending I could not get at it.

Just as we pushed off, I could see by the cabin lights that Miss Madeline had crept down at her sister's feet; but on feeling now in the dark, I found they were sitting side by side; so I got one of the blankets over them, and then, after a deal of persuading, managed to get them to take some of the biscuit and cheese, and some wine. Tom and I took a sup each, and put our biscuit and cheese on the seat by us, and made ready for a start again, eating as we went on, and then rowing as true as we could, so as to keep the boat's head the same way; and without any more stoppage, for we knew

what trouble those poor gals were in, starting as they were at every splash we laid down to our work, and rowed on, hour after hour, right away into the thick darkness.

PROLOGUES AND EPILOGUES.

DRAMATIC authors have no reason now-a-days to echo Dryden's anathema upon the man who first wrote good prologues; that rent-charge on wit has not been levied for many a year. A new play fitted with the appendages of prologue and epilogue, would create much the same sort of sensation among a modern audience as the appearance of a gentleman with a pigtail would excite in a fashionable assembly. The 'Occasional Address,' a distant cousin of the prologue, may now and then be heard; but the once potent auxiliaries of the dramatist have long since gone to dusty death, in the lumber-room of literature.

Wise and witty Rosalind says: 'If it be true that good wine needs no bush, 'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue. Yet, to good wine they do use good bushes; and good plays prove the better by the help of a good epilogue.' Shakspeare, however, seems to have had little faith in his own preachment, and seldom sought to cajole his audience into applauding his plays. *Henry VIII.* is the only one among them provided with prologue and epilogue; *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, have prologues, but no epilogues; while *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *The Tempest*, and the Second Part of *Henry IV.*, are furnished with epilogue only. Shakspeare's prologues are merely explanations of the coming action, telling the audience how they may

See away their shilling
Richly in two short hours.

His epilogues are more noteworthy. That to *Henry IV.* is altogether a curiosity, and would seem to have been written as much in the interest of the management as that of the author. A dancer is made the mouthpiece of the dramatist; why, we gather from his own lips: 'Be it known to you (as it is very well), I was lately here in the end of a displeasing play, to pray your patiences for it, and to promise you a better. I did mean, indeed, to pay you with this; which if, like an ill venture, it come unluckily home, I break, and you, my gentle creditors, lose. . . . If you be not much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katherine of France; where, for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already he be killed with your hard opinions, for Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man!'

Three out of Shakspeare's four epilogues are alike in one respect—he appeals chiefly to the ladies to crown his play with success, and uses pretty nearly the same argument in each. Rosalind says: 'I charge you, O women, for the love you bear to men, to like as much of the play as pleases them; and so I charge you, O men, for the love you bear to women (as I perceive by your simpering none of you hate them), that between you and the women, the play may please!' So 'all the gentlemen have forgiven me,' says the dancer; 'if the gentlemen will not, then the gentlemen do not agree with the gentlemen, which was never

seen before in such an assembly!' And again in *Henry VIII.*, the epilogue speaker argues:

I fear

All the expected good we are like to hear
For this play at this time, is only in
The merciful construction of good women,
For such a one we shewed them. If they smile,
And say 'twill do, I know, within a while,
All the best men are ours; for 'tis ill hap,
If they hold, when their ladies bid them clap!

Beaumont and Fletcher's prologues and epilogues are briefly and spiritedly written; but they did not approve the custom, although they occasionally bowed to it. One of their prologues commences:

To promise much before a play begin,
And when 'tis done, ask pardon, is a sin
We'll not be guilty of.

Indeed, most of the prologues and epilogues printed with their dramas were furnished by other pens, when the plays were revived after their authors' decease; and from Manager Henslowe's Diary, we learn that five shillings was the price usually paid for such things. In the prologue written for the revival of *The Nice Valour*, Fletcher's aversion to the practice of begging the audience's favour is thus plainly avowed:

It's grown a fashion of late in these days,
To come and beg a surffiance to our plays:
Faith, gentlemen, our poet ever writ
Language so good, mixed with such sprightly wit,
He made the theatre so sovereign
With his rare scenes, he scorned this crouching vein.
We stabbed him with keen daggers, when we prayed
Him write a preface to a play well made!

Ben Jonson converted the prologue into a weapon of offence, with which he attacked his more popular rivals. Thus, in the prologue to *Every Man in his Humour*, after declaring he scorns to fight over the Wars of the Roses with rusty swords and 'foot and half-foot words,' he announces his comedy as being a model one, such as other plays should be:

Where neither Chorus wafts you o'er the seas,
Nor creaking throne comes down, the boys to please;
Nor nimble squib is seen to make afraid
The gentlewomen; nor rolled bullet heard
To say, it thunders; nor tempestuous drum
Rumblies to tell you when the storm doth come;
But deeds and language, such as men do use,
And persons, such as Comedy would choose,
When she would shew an image of the times,
And sport with human follies, not with crimes.

On another occasion, he reminded his auditors that he did not deal in forced and monstrous action; but observed the laws of time, place, and persons; seeking, too, to mix some profit with the pleasure he provided; and so little was Ben given to the crouching vein, that he did not scruple to tell his patrons that, should they receive his play with disapprobation, it would prove that they had lost the art of judging, not he the art of writing.

The performances at our Elizabethan theatres always commenced with a flourish of trumpets; a second flourish was the prelude to the Induction, if there happened to be one; and a third ushered in the prologue, the speaker of which was attired in a long black velvet cloak, and sometimes wore a crown of laurel or bay. This rule was occasionally broken, as in Shakspeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, when he appeared as

A prologue armed—but not in confidence
Of author's pen or actor's voice; but suited
In like conditions as our argument.

Little seems to have been left to the actor's option:

The cloaks we wear, the legs we make, the place
We stand in must be one; and one the face
Not altered, nor exceeded; if it be,
A general hiss hangs on our levity.

Originally, the delivery of both prologue and epilogue devolved upon the author himself; but the poets soon delegated the unwelcome office to others, and every theatre had its recognised speaker of prologues and epilogues. Rosalind tells us it was not the fashion to give the lady the epilogue; and another authority assures us 'a she prologue is as rare as a usurer's alms.' The prologue to *Shirley's Coronation*, produced in 1640, was spoken by a woman, but it was evidently considered an innovation, the actress pleading that for once a lady might

Speak the prologue, give as free
A welcome to the theatre, as he
That with a little beard, a long black cloak,
With a starched face and supple leg, hath spoke
Before the plays this twelvemonth.

While Betterton was on the stage, the speaking of the prologues usually fell to his lot, and with good reason. Colley Cibber, who considered the delivery of a prologue the severest test of an actor's elocutionary powers, says: 'Betterton had a natural gravity that gave strength to good sense; a tempered spirit that gave life to wit; and a dry reserve in his smile, that threw ridicule into its brightest colours.' Wilks succeeded Betterton as prologue-speaker; but when Dryden brought out his *Pilgrim*, he paid Cibber the unusual compliment of desiring him to speak both prologue and epilogue; a request, Wilks declared, which was an affront to the rest of the company. The epilogue gradually found its way into female hands, and the male monopoly once broken in upon, the ladies were not long in obtaining a fair share of the prologue-speaking. Most of Congreve's were intrusted to Mrs Bracegirdle; and it was by her piquant delivery of one of Dryden's, that Nell Gwynne won her dubious promotion from the playhouse to the palace.

Playgoers at this time could provide themselves with broadside copies of the prologue and epilogue of the evening at the doors of the theatre; and these dramatic appendages had become of such importance, that in not a few cases the reproach was deserved, that the wit was ended before the play began. They had, in fact, undergone a complete transformation, by being made the vehicles of political, literary, and social satire. Congreve well describes the difference between the old and new fashions:

In former days,
Prologues were serious speeches before plays;
Grave solemn things, as graces are to feasts,
Where poets begged a blessing from the guests.
But now, no more as suppliants we come;
A play makes war, and prologue is the drum;
Armed with keen satire and with pointed wit,
We threaten you who do for judges sit.

Dryden's power of language and command of versification enabled him to more than hold his own against all rivals in this species of composition, and his aid was continually invoked in behalf of new plays. He varied his mode of writing according to circumstances: when addressing an Oxford audience, assuming a dignified and respectful tone he seldom employed in appealing to the grosser tastes of metropolitan playgoers. One of his later prologues, produced during William III's Irish

campaign, was prohibited after the first night's delivery, as offensive to the powers that were. In another, he girds at his literary foes—

Who, like bold padders, scorn by night to prey,
But rob by sunshine, in the face of day;
Nay, scarce the common ceremony use
Of, 'Stand, sir, and deliver up your muse!'
But knock the poet down, and, with a grace,
Mount Pegasus before the owner's face. . . .
Such men in poetry may claim some part,
They have the licence, though they want the art.

Dryden certainly did not want the art, and as certainly he scrupled not to use the licence, for there is scarcely one, if one, of his fine productions in this line that is not sadly disfigured by coarseness and indecency. The prologues of Davenant, Behn, Shadwell, and the mob of those who wrote with more ease than effect, have that one feature of resemblance to the works of the great poet; in other respects, no comparison can be made between them.

Addison is credited with having written the most successful epilogue ever spoken on the English stage—that to Philips's *Distressed Mother*, produced in 1712. His own famous tragedy, depicting

A brave man struggling in the storms of fate,
And greatly falling with a falling state,

had a splendid prelude in Pope's noble prologue, without doubt the finest ever written, worthy of Steele's eulogy and the thundering applause it received on the memorable first performance of *Cato*, when contending factions strove as to which should applaud the most, and the author of the prologue, to use his own words, 'sore against his will, was clapped into a stanch Whig almost every two lines.'

Dr Johnson did not disdain to try his heavy hand at these trifles of the hour. Charity impelled him to furnish a prologue for Kelly's unsuccessful comedy, *A Word to the Wise*, when it was played for the benefit of Kelly's widow and family; and his friendship for Goldsmith induced him to volunteer one for *The Good-natured Man*, which turned out a very lugubrious specimen of the species. He was more successful in the case of his own play of *Irene*, the prologue to which is manly and spirited—

Be this at least his praise, be this his pride,
To force applause no modern arts are tried.
Should partial cat-calls all his hopes confound,
He bids no trumpet quell the fatal sound;
Should welcome sleep relieve the weary wit,
He rolls no thunders o'er the drowsy pit:
No snares to captivate the judgment spreads,
Nor bribes your eyes to prejudice your heads.
Unmoved, though wittings sneer, and rivals rail,
Studios to please, yet not ashamed to fail;
He scorns the meek address, the suppliant strain,
With merit needless, and without it, vain;
In reason, nature, truth, he dares to trust;
Ye fops be silent, and ye wits be just!

Goldsmith's efforts of a similar kind were cast in a much lighter mould. He was driven wall-nigh mad trying to fit *She Stoops to Conquer* with an epilogue. Murphy sent him one to be sung by Miss Catley, which, after the poet had given it form and finish, was approved by that actress; but Mrs Bulkeley, who played the heroine, threatened to throw up her part if she was not allowed to speak the epilogue according to the custom of the theatre. In this dilemma, Goldsmith wrote a quarrelling epilogue, bringing both actresses before the curtain, and then

Miss Catley turned obstinate. The badgered author wrote a third; but this, Manager Colman declared was too bad to be spoken by anybody; and he passed the same verdict upon a fourth supplied by Goldsmith's friend, Cradock; so the poet had to set to work afresh, and at last succeeded in silencing, if not satisfying, all parties concerned.

Garrick was an adept in the art of prologue-writing, and made Johnson wonder at his prolificness and versatility. He furnished the stage with above a hundred prologues and epilogues of more than average literary merit. Here, in four lines, the great actor gives us his tribute to the talent of the first and last of English harlequins:

When Lun appeared, with matchless art and whim,
He gave the power of speech to every limb;

Though masked and mute, conveyed his quick intent,

And told in frolic gestures all he meant.

He put, too, a happy couplet in the mouth of Mrs Barry, the actress of tragedy heroines:

No saint can lead a better life than I,
For half is spent in learning how to die.

There is something pathetic in Garrick's allusion to the fleeting nature of his art, made when the loss of Quin and Mrs Cibber was fresh in his mind:

He who struts his hour upon the stage,
Can scarce extend his fame for half an age;
Nor pen nor pencil can the actor save;
The art and artist share one common grave.
O let me drop one tributary tear
On poor Jack Falstaff's grave and Juliet's bier!
You to their worth must testimony give;
'Tis in your hearts alone their fame can live.
Still, as the scenes of life will shift away,
The strong impressions of their art decay;
Your children cannot feel what you have known;
They'll boast of Quins and Cibbers of their own!

Sheridan made a hit with what Walpole calls 'a very good though endless prologue,' spoken before the *Miniature Picture* of Lady Craven. It was so much relished by the audience, that they demanded its repetition after the comedy was concluded; and although it was then past midnight, waited patiently till King could be fetched from home to obey their commands. Spite of this success, Sheridan obtained Garrick's aid when a prologue was wanted for *The School for Scandal*; indeed, dramatists generally seem about this time to have relinquished the providing of these appendages, and left the task entirely in the hands of the managers, and this abdication of their duty naturally led to the speedy abolition of prologues and epilogues altogether.

BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

CHAPTER XXIX.—AT GRELLIER'S ALMSHOUSES.

A CHEERLESS wintry morning, with a clouded sky, and a bitter north-east wind blowing shrilly through the denuded woods of Belair. But the discomfort outside served only to enhance the charming coquiness of the bright little morning-room which owned Miss Spencelaugh for its mistress. There she sat, the most charming object in that room, in a low chair on one side of the glowing fireplace, her white dressing-robe falling in ample folds around her, and all the wealth of her raven hair, held only by a band of blue velvet, flowing loosely down her back. On the opposite side of the fireplace sat homely Jane Garrod, in strange contrast with this lovely vision. There was an expression

of doubt and perplexity on the face of Frederica. She was thinking intently, her cheek resting on the tip of her forefinger, while her other hand held the Statement which had been drawn up by John English, and sent to her through Jane Garrod, and which she had just finished reading aloud. Each point had been verbally annotated by Jane as she read; and she was now thinking over the strange story which had thus singularly been brought to her knowledge, and as to the merits of which she was now called upon to decide.

'Your eyes are brighter, my bonny one, than when I saw you last,' muttered Jane to herself, while waiting for Frederica to speak; 'and your cheeks have got back some of the colour they used to have in them when you were a girl. Whatever your trouble was, you have pulled bravely through it. There is one honest heart I know of that loves you fondly. Do you feel any faint feeble flutterings that way, I wonder? I think you do—I think you do.'

'This is a very strange story, Jane,' said Frederica at length, 'and I really don't know what to think of it. It seems to bear the stamp of truth on every line, and yet some of its statements are almost incredible. The points that still want clearing up are many and difficult; and the whole affair is certainly rendered more complicated by the unaccountable disappearance of Mr English. Even supposing him to have been suddenly called away, I cannot understand why he has not written to you since his departure.'

'There's some treachery at work in the matter, Miss Frederica, you take my word for it,' said Jane with energy.

'I have once or twice had the same thought myself; but then you tell me that you have ascertained that Mr English did really quit Pevsey Bay by a certain train, having taken a ticket for London.'

'Just so,' said Jane. 'Still, I am none the less certain that some treachery has been at work. He may have been enticed away by a false message, and be neither able to write nor come back. Oh, Miss Frederica, darling, something must be done, and that at once!'

'I feel with you, nurse, that something must be done. The truth or falsehood of this Statement must be proved. If what is here put down be true, then has a foul and hideous wrong been done, and the sooner it is brought to light, and the perpetrators of it punished, the better it will be for all of us. If, on the contrary, it be nothing but an ingeniously woven web of lies, then the writer of it—'

'But it is not a web of lies, Miss Frederica, but gospel truth every word of it,' burst in Jane vehemently. 'Think of the likeness—so strong that after twenty years it scared me as if I had seen a ghost. Think of the strange mark on his shoulder—the coiled snake holding the mystic lotos-flower in its mouth. Think over, one by one, the different things he has put down on that paper, and then you must be as firmly convinced as I am that he has not written a word more than the bare truth.'

'You are letting your enthusiasm, and your liking for Mr English, run away with your reason,' said Frederica. 'In the unexplained absence of that gentleman, and as he has appealed to me, I will, with Heaven's help, have this story sifted to the bottom, and so deal with it as I shall find it true or false!' Her cheeks wore an added flush as

she said these words ; but in her eyes there was a solemn, almost melancholy light, as though she felt that the duty she had taken upon herself to perform would lead her perforce through dark and troubled waters, to a goal which as yet she discerned not at all.

'Spoken like my own brave darling!' said Jane admiringly. 'We want nothing but the truth.'

Frederica ran her eye over the Statement again. 'It almost seems to me,' she said, 'that it would be better for me not to interfere personally in this matter at all, but to put it as it now stands into the hands of my lawyer, Mr Penning, and leave him to test its value in whatever way he may deem advisable. And yet the interests involved in it are so peculiar, and there are those under this roof who would be so deeply compromised if what this narrative contains be true, that I cannot help feeling reluctant to let it pass out of my hands without at least giving one person whom it deeply concerns a knowledge of the case equal to my own, so that she may be prepared at the proper time to disprove its statements, should she ever be called upon to do so. Then, again, the story is such an incredible one, and there are so many weak points about it at present, that I question whether quiet, matter-of-fact Mr Penning would not pooch-pooch it altogether, and smile compassionately upon me for allowing myself to put faith in so palpable an absurdity.'

'Cannot some of those weak points be strengthened?' said Jane.

'How so?' said Frederica.

'Mr English makes mention there of a room in which he was shut up before he was taken across the sea—of a room with barred windows, in which there was a hideous bed that frightened him into a fit one day. Now, there must have been such a room, Miss Frederica.'

'There may have been such a room certainly, nurse ; or it may have had an existence merely in the imagination of Mr English. But even granting the room to have been a real one, what then ? Where are we to find it?—and if found, in what way would it benefit our case?'

'Wait a bit, Miss Frederica, please,' said Jane. 'Besides what Mr English has put down on that paper, he told me many little things that came into his memory, bit by bit, when we were talking together about his early life ; and many a long talk about it we had. Among other things, he told me something more about that house with the barred windows, which would seem to shew that he was shut up there for some time. Whenever he cried to be taken back to the place he had been brought from, and could not be quieted any other way, the people of the house used to take him down stairs, and hold him over a dark hole or well, in one of the lower rooms, into which they threatened to throw him unless he behaved better. The recollection of that horrible well had been impressed so strongly on his childish mind, that he could still recall the shudder with which long afterwards he would awake at night from a dream of being cast headlong into it. Now, there was something in all this that struck me in a way I cannot explain. I've been turning it over and over in my mind—churning it, like—ever since Mr English told me about it ; and it was only this very morning that the idea flashed all at once into my head that the house he spoke about could have been no other than White Grange, a lonely farmhouse among the hills, about a dozen miles from Kingsthorpe. You

know, Miss Frederica, that I was brought up not many miles from there ; and once, when I was a thin slip of a girl, my father, who was a miller, had occasion to go to White Grange on business, and he took me in the cart with him. Whether the windows had iron bars outside them or not, I can't just say ; but I do recollect being shewn in one of the outhouses a deep grim-looking well—they took off the wooden cover, so that I might see down into it—and very frightened I was, more particularly when they told me the story that was connected with it. It was said that more than a hundred years before that time, a traveller, who had lost his way, and had begged a night's shelter at the Grange, had been foully murdered, and his body thrown into the well ; and never after that time would anybody touch a drop of the water that was drawn from it. The name of the family that lived at White Grange when I knew it was Sandysen, and they didn't bear an over-good name among us country-folk : many queer things were whispered about them.—Now, supposing, Miss Frederica, that it was really White Grange where Mr English was shut up as a child, mightn't it be worth our while just to inquire whether any of the family who lived there five-and-twenty years ago can now be found ? and if they can be found, whether anything can be got from them as to such a child having been shut up there, and for what purpose ? Would it not be worth our while to try this?'

Miss Spenceclough agreed that it might, perhaps, be worth while to make such inquiries, but was doubtful as to their resulting in anything tangible. It was, however, ultimately decided that Jane should do what she could in the matter, and that no further steps should be taken until she had done so.

So Jane set about making cautious inquiries among her friends and neighbours through the country-side ; which inquiries resulted in the discovery that the family that had occupied White Grange twenty years previously were, with one exception, either dead or gone abroad. That one exception was an old woman now residing in Grellier's almshouses at Eastringham. With this information, Jane went once more to Frederica ; and next afternoon the Belair brougham was put into requisition, and the heiress and her humble companion were driven over to the place in question.

Grellier's gift to the poor of Eastringham—to twelve relics of decayed tradesmen of the burgh—was a foundation of ancient date. It had been in existence for three centuries ; but although it had waxed fat and plethoric upon the accumulated interest of its capital, and the increase of revenue derived from the advance in the value of its lands and tenements in different parts of the county, it had not yet seen its way clearly to substitute for the tumble-down, inconvenient old edifices in which so many generations of poor old women had breathed their last, a row of substantial modern-built cottages ; nor to increase the scanty stipend doled out weekly to its ancient recipients, which, in these days, was hardly sufficient to keep body and soul together. But Grellier's charity had a governor and directors of its own ; all gentlemen of wealth and standing ; who met in the board-room twice a year, to audit the accounts, fill up vacancies, and discuss a choice luncheon from the *Royal Hotel* ; and if they were satisfied with the state of Grellier's affairs, surely no one else had any right or reason to complain.

'I want Margaret Fennell. Can you tell me in which of these cottages I shall find her?' asked Frederica of an old crone who was airing herself feebly in the wintry sunshine.

The old woman put her hand to her eyes, and blinked weakly for a moment or two at the bright vision before her. 'Margaret Fennell is it your Leddyship is axing for?' she said at last in a thin quavering voice. 'There's no such body living here.—Stay a bit, though,' she added, with a clutch of her thin brown hand at vacancy. 'It's mebbe Owd Meg as your Leddyship is looking for. She lives, Owd Meg does, in the top house but two; and she's a cat, that's what she is, and everybody will tell you the same. The top house but two, your Leddyship. And does your Leddyship happen to have an ounce of tea or a bit of snuff in your pocket, to comfort a poor old body with? It's precious little of either we gets here. They take good care of that—that they do.' Frederica had dropped some money into the old woman's hand almost before she had done speaking, and so left her, staring speechlessly at the bright silver coins in her skinny palm.

The 'top house but two' looked, if possible, more ruinous and unfit for a human being to live in than any of its neighbours, except that it was clean both inside and out, as, indeed, were all the almshouses: the matron was very particular, and properly so, on the score of cleanliness; and had a tongue of her own, which she rattled about the ears of the feeble old dames to some purpose whenever she found anything that offended her nice sense of the virtue that comes next to godliness in her frequent rounds of 'sniffing and prying,' as her domiciliary visits were irreverently termed by the inmates.

Frederica knocked timidly at the heavy oaken door. 'Why don't you come in, you imp—you devil! instead of knocking there! How many times do you want telling?' screamed a harsh, high-pitched voice from within. Frederica opened the door a few inches, and looking in, had a vision of an old woman smuggling a black bottle and a short black pipe rapidly out of sight. Looking again, she saw that this woman was very old, with a hook nose and a pointed chin, which nearly met; and with black eyes, that still retained something of their former bold bright look. Her long gray hair was without covering of any kind, and fell in a wild dishevelled mass over her shoulders. She was wrapped in an old woollen shawl of many faded colours; and when Frederica saw her first, was crouching over a meagre spark of fire, but rose suddenly as her visitor entered, displaying, as she did so, a form tall beyond the ordinary height of women.

'Beg your pardon, my pretty lady,' she said; 'but I thought it was that rascalion of a baker's boy, who always will knock, and trail my poor bones across the floor to open the door for him. Yah! I'll break the bellows over his head next time he comes!' she added viciously. Then changing suddenly into a half-whining, half-caressing tone, she said: 'Old Meg can guess what has brought those bright eyes here. Cross her hand with a bonny bit of yellow goold, and she'll tell the beautiful lady her fortune, as predicted by the stars, and confirmed by the changes of the cards, which cannot lie when shuffled by the hands of a wise woman. Cross my palm with a bonny bit of goold, and I'll tell you your fortune true!'

'You mistake the purpose which has brought me here,' said Frederica with a smile. 'I do not want my fortune told at present.'

'Then what should bring a fine lady like you to such a hole as this?' said Meg suspiciously.

'I have come in search of certain information, which I believe you can supply me with.'

'Me supply you with information! Nay, nay; you're mistaken there. What should a poor old woman like me know, unless it was the prices of butter and cheese, and such like; with, maybe, now and then a comforting text or two.' Her face broadened into a wicked leer as she said these words. 'Besides that,' she added, 'my memory's so bad that at times I can't recollect what happened the day before yesterday, let alone things years ago. Nay, nay, you'll get no information out of Old Meg.'

Miss Spencelaugh in nowise daunted, advanced into the room, followed by Jane Garrod, and stood looking down for a moment or two at the miserable creature, who had sunk into her chair again, and drawn her shawl round her, and was cowering over the embers, taking no further heed of her visitors.

'Five-and-twenty years ago, if I am rightly informed,' said Frederica, 'you went to live with Job Sandyson as housekeeper at White Grange.'

'Five—and—twenty years ago,' muttered Meg slowly. 'That's a long, long time to look back to. Well—maybe I did, and maybe I didn't—what then?'

'One-and-twenty years ago—try to carry your mind back to that time—a child, a boy about five years old, who belonged in no way to any one living in the house, was taken to White Grange, and after being shut up there for several weeks in one of the upper rooms—a room with barred windows—was fetched away after dark, one night, by a man and two women.'

'A lame man and one woman!' screamed the hag. 'I allus said we should hear of it; I told Nance so a dozen times; and my words have come true after all these years!'

'Then you do recollect the circumstance I mention?' said Frederica eagerly. In her statement respecting the child she had boldly hazarded a vague surmise as a fact, and she felt that her courage was about to be rewarded.

'Curses on this blabbing tongue of mine!' hissed Meg from between her toothless gums. 'You mustn't mind an old woman's wanderings, my sweet miss,' she added. 'My head's a bit light at odd times, and then I fancy all sorts of rubbish.'

'But I am certain that you can tell me what I want to know,' said Frederica; 'and I will pay you well for your information.' With that she took out her purse, and counted five sovereigns, one after another, on to the dirty little table. Meg's head came round with a twitch as the pleasant chink of the gold fell on her ear, while over her face there crept such an expression of mingled greed, cunning, and fiendish malignity, as caused Frederica to draw back in horror. 'There are five sovereigns for you,' said Miss Spencelaugh with a shudder; 'and you shall have five more if you answer my questions truthfully.'

Meg's brown skinny arm and thin cramped fingers came suddenly out from the folds of her shawl, and pounced on the gold as savagely as though it were some living thing for whose heart's blood she was hungering. A moment or two she gazed at the bright yellow pieces in her open palm,

and then she spat on them. 'That's for luck,' she muttered. Then producing a dirty bit of rag from some mysterious pocket, she folded the sovereigns carefully in it, and deftly smuggled the package out of sight among her tattered habiliments. 'Remember, five more before you go away,' she said in an eager whisper.

'I shall keep my promise,' said Frederica.

'Then ax me what you like, and I'll answer you as far as I know the truth.'

'You remember a child being brought to the White Grange twenty-one years ago?'

'Ay, I remember.'

'Whose child was it, and what was its name?'

'I dun know.'

'Who took it to White Grange?'

'Mrs Winch, landlady of the *Hand and Dagger* at Normanford.'

'Who fetched it away?'

'Mrs Winch and her brother the lame doctor—Kruff or Kreefe was his name.'

'How long was the child kept at White Grange?'

'For six weeks.'

'Was he kept locked up all that time?'

'Yes, all that time, in the strong room at the top of the house. Once he screamed himself into a fit, and we had hard work to get him round again. Once or twice, when he was in his tantrums—crying to be let out and taken back home—Old Job, he took him down stairs, and taking the lid off the well, threatened to pitch him headfirst in, and so frightened him into being quiet for a while.'

'Describe the appearance of the child, as far as your memory will serve to do so.'

'He was as handsome a lad as ever I see, with black hair and a devil of a temper.'

'You say that he was fetched away by Dr Kreefe and his sister?'

'Ay, they came for him one dark night. They had a little covered cart waiting just outside the gate; and they put the lad into it, and drove away with him; and I've never clapt eyes on him from that day to this.'

'You are positive that you know nothing as to the child's name or parentage?'

'Nothing at all—I'll take my oath,' said Meg emphatically. 'Old Job Sandysen, he knew who the child belonged to; and Jim Billings, he knew; but neither my girl Nance nor me was ever told. Old Job gave Nance and me two sovereigns apiece the day after the lad was taken away, and told us never to say a word, or he'd twist our necks for us; and he would have done it as soon as look at us.'

'Job Sandysen has been dead many years, I am told,' said Frederica; 'but who was Jim Billings? and how did you become aware that he knew anything respecting the child?'

'Jim was a footman at Belair at that time, and was courting my Nance; and she, soft-like, as all wenches are when they're in love, let out everything to him about the lad, and asked him whose child he thought it was. Jim laughed at her, and called her a young fool, and said he knew well enow whose child it was, and all about it; but that he wasn't going to tell her or anybody else, because it was a secret, and he meant to make a lot of money out of it.'

'And what became of this man? Did he marry your daughter?'

'Not him,' said Meg. 'He got into trouble soon

after that—was mixed up in some way with a robbery—and got twenty years across the herring-pond. Nance went to see him when he was in the stone-jug, and didn't forget to ask him about the child—you see, we thought we might as well make a bit of money by the secret, now he was going away. But do what Nance would, she couldn't get him to split. "The secret will keep," said he. "I shall be back before ten years are over, and then I shall make my fortune out of it." But we never saw Jim Billings after that day; and whether he's alive or dead, I neither know nor care.'

After a few more questions of minor importance, Frederica laid the remaining five sovereigns on the table, and rose to go. 'I shall call and see you another day, if you will let me,' she said—not about this matter, but about yourself. I want to see you with more comforts round you, and in a happier frame of mind than you are at present.'

'Ay, ay, bless your sweet face, miss; I shall allus be glad to see you. But Meg has been a bad un all her life, and a bad un she'll die—yes, a bad un she'll die.'

Jane Garrod, turning to look as she followed Frederica out of the room, saw Meg winking, and beckoning to her to go back and take a friendly dram out of the black bottle, which she had already brought from its hiding-place.

CHAPTER XXX.—A FRUITLESS VISIT.

On leaving Grellier's almshouses, Miss Spence-laugh drove into Normanford, and was set down at the *Hand and Dagger*. After hearing Old Meg's narrative, she had at once decided to call upon Mrs Winch. There was just a faint possibility, Frederica thought, that when the landlady learned how much was known to her already, she might see the uselessness of further concealment, and deem it best to make a full confession of her share in the abduction of the child. At all events, the chance was one worth trying. What she had just heard at Eastingham only served to confirm more fully her belief in the truth of John English's strange story. Having taken this matter in hand, she was determined to go through with it, happen what might.

It was the slack time of the day at the *Hand and Dagger*, and Mrs Winch was seated at work in her own little room. She rose in some confusion as Frederica was ushered in, and a dark frown passed like a spasm over her face; but she recovered herself immediately. 'This is indeed an honour, Miss Spence-laugh,' she said, with a respectful courtesy. 'I sincerely trust that Sir Philip is no worse; and her Ladyship—I hope that she is quite well.—Maria, a chair for Miss Spence-laugh.—Will you allow me to offer you a glass of sherry and a biscuit?'

Frederica declined the refreshment, but accepted the chair. She had come in alone, leaving Jane Garrod in the brougham. She was perplexed in what way to begin what she wanted to say. She felt, rather than saw, the landlady's cold inquisitive eyes fixed upon her; and perceived more clearly than she had hitherto done the difficulties of the task before her. She would have felt more reassured could she have known how timidly the widow's usually fearless heart was beating—could she have known what gnawing anxiety, what haunting fears, were at work behind that pale, colourless face, intent on nothing more important just then, as

it seemed, than the neat folding up of a piece of embroidery, the completion of which Miss Spencelaugh's arrival had delayed.

'You are, I believe,' said Frederica, 'acquainted with a gentleman of the name of Mr John English?'

'Mr English? O yes, I know him very well,' said the landlady with a ready smile. 'He slept here two nights on his first arrival at Normanford; and a more affable, pleasant-spoken gentleman I don't know anywhere.'

'Mr English had, I believe, on one occasion, some conversation with you on a rather peculiar topic. I daresay you know to what I allude.'

'Pardon my stupidity, but really I do not,' said the widow as cool as an icicle. 'Mr English and I had many conversations together. Will you oblige me by giving me more precise details as to the topic in question?'

Frederica flushed slightly. There was a lurking defiance in the widow's manner of saying these words that chafed her. 'Mr English spoke to you on one occasion respecting a child,' she said, with that cold metallic ring in her voice which was never heard except when her pride was touched—'a child who was taken to America by your brother, Dr Kreefe, and his wife. You, Mrs Winch, were by when the child was put on board ship. Mr English asked you the child's name, and to whom it belonged; and I am here to-day to ask you the same question.'

'Oh,' said the widow with a little shrug, 'is that all? What a trifling matter to need so elaborate a preface! I answered Mr English's question, as I now answer yours, Miss Spencelaugh. The child belonged to a friend of my brother, who had emigrated about a year previously, and Jeremiah agreed to take him out to rejoin his parents at New York. The circumstance was such a trivial one that I had really forgotten it till Mr English recalled it to my recollection. Mr English was quite satisfied with my explanation, and I am certainly at a loss to understand why so great a lady as Miss Spencelaugh should'—

'Stop one moment, if you please,' said Frederica coldly. 'Mr English was *not* satisfied with your explanation, otherwise I should not be here to-day. Do you mean to assert positively, Mrs Winch, that you know nothing more respecting the child who was taken by your brother and his wife to America than you have just now told me?'

'I do assert so, most positively.'

'And yet it was this very child, Mrs Winch, who was taken by you to White Grange; and after being locked up there for six weeks, was fetched away surreptitiously after nightfall by yourself and your brother! And yet you tell me that you do not know its name!'

The widow's pale face grew a shade paler as Frederica spoke, and an evil look came into her eyes.

'Where did you learn all that?' she exclaimed. 'A lie! a lie! every word of it, I tell you. And even if it were true, which I deny that it is, what right have you, or any other person, to come prying into my private affairs? I will not be questioned thus about matters that concern myself alone. You have got my answer—I know nothing about the child; and if you question me till doomsday, I have none other to give.'

'Take care!' said Frederica gravely as she rose from her seat. 'The net is closing round you slowly but surely; the links of the chain are being

forged one by one, and but few are wanting now. Be warned in time. Reveal everything, and so save yourself while you can yet do so. Soon it will be too late.'

'Go, go!' said the widow in a hoarse whisper, with one hand pressed to her heart, while the other pointed to the door. 'Go, before I do myself or you an injury. You presume on your position, Miss Spencelaugh, to come and insult me in my own house. But I can bear it no longer. Go!'

Frederica bowed her head, and drew her veil over her face, and passed out slowly without another word.

'Who told her about White Grange, I wonder?' said the widow to herself as soon as the door was closed behind her visitor. 'Why, who could tell her but old Meg Fennell! There's no one else left alive that knows of it. To think that the old witch should tell, after keeping the secret so faithfully all these years! But she would sell her own soul for gold. I thought I had buried her alive, put her out of the way of being found by anybody, when I got her into the almshouses at Easttringham. But though they've found out all about White Grange, they've yet to prove who the child was that was taken there; and who is there now living that could tell them that, except her Ladyship and myself? And even if, by some miracle, they got to know it, and the worst came to the worst, why, even in that case, we should have nothing really to fear.—Ah! Miss Frederica, dear, it is plain to see who has won your proud heart at last; but you little dream that at the end of your search you will find yourself in the arms of a skeleton.' There was something diabolical in the laugh with which the widow ended these words. She then took a purse from her pocket, which she proceeded to open, and drew from it a piece of paper folded up into a very small compass, which she opened and smoothed out very carefully. It was a telegram, and the information it conveyed was comprised in one short line. A triumphant smile lighted up the widow's pale face as she read it. 'So ends the tragedy,' she said. 'The heroine may weep for her hero, but he will never come back again; his is the sleep that knows no waking. I will go up to Belair after dusk this evening, and shew this paper to my Lady. What a weary load it will lift off her heart!' She carefully refolded the telegram, and put it away in her purse. 'Poor young gentleman!' she murmured. 'How kindly, and brave, and handsome he was! He deserved a better fate.—Maria, bring me a small glass of cognac.'

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